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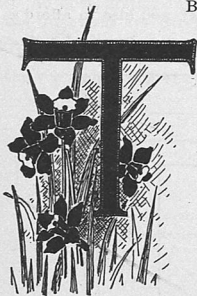
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HOW TO DECORATE A ROOM.

By LEWIS F. DAY.



HE superiority of example to precept is proverbial. Perhaps, then, the simplest way of inculcating the principles on which a house should be decorated will be to take some one room as an instance, and proceed to work out a scheme for its decoration from the very beginning.

In the first place the question is, Who is to inhabit it? What manner of man is he? What are his tastes and habits? For what purpose does he intend the room? We will imagine him a man under middle age, married some eight or nine years, his income sufficient for moderate comfort, but not adequate to anything like display or even luxury. His days are spent away from home in the counting house or office. On his return he dines, and his evenings are usually spent quietly with his wife in their sitting or living room. This is the room that it is proposed to make pleasant. It is a room for rest and quiet. A number of guests is such an unusual event with him that it need not be taken into consideration. The atmosphere of a large party is no more congenial to him intellectually than it is physically, although once or twice in the year his wife and he do their best to be gracious to a number of worthy people with whom circumstances compel them to be on friendly terms, but with whom they have not sufficient sympathy to ask them to spend an evening at their house alone. The two or three who often do pass the evening with them are friends, familiar because of mutual sympathies. In arranging his room after his own fashion, therefore, he will probably be consulting their comfort as well as his own, and if not, he will surely make them more comfortable by carrying out his own idea than by aiming vainly to fulfil theirs.

It is intended that the room should be adapted to the habits of its inmates, and in particular to their evening occupations. These are various. Sometimes the owner returns from business fagged and wants rest; or worried and wants soothing; or depressed and wants rousing. Sometimes the day's work has scarcely taxed his energies, and he wants to be doing something. His tastes are perhaps not very pronounced. He is fond of reading, but not such an eager reader as to pursue that pleasure under difficulties. He is no musician, but he has great pleasure in music, and he delights, especially when he is in the passive mood, to sit and listen to his wife at the piano. Now that we know something of the man and his habits, it becomes possible to suggest a reasonable scheme for the arrangement of his room.

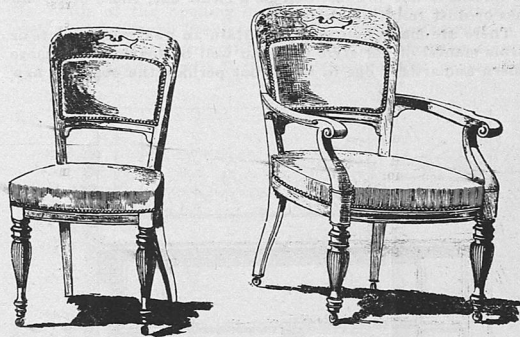
As it is chiefly in the evening that this room will be inhabited, we must beware of making it too dark. That would involve difficulty in the way of illumination, which means gas, which means heat, foul air, heaviness and general discomfort. If a moderator or duplex lamp (or two, if the room is rather large) will not sufficiently illuminate it, it is too dark. On the other hand it must not be too light, or we shall lose the feeling of repose that we most want.

Call to mind the coziest rooms you can think of, and you will find that none of them are in a very light key. They are not white-and-gold drawing-rooms, but sober morning rooms, or dining-rooms (so-called) that are really living rooms. The tone of the room then is determined, not so dark as to necessitate gas, not so light as to appear cold or naked; the tint is a matter of choice, to be settled according to preference, or perhaps with reference to the other rooms; one does not want to have all the rooms in the house of one color.

Before the distribution of the color and its general arrangement can be determined, we must have some notion of the general character of the room itself, and of the more important articles of furniture. It is of no use, for example, to lavish work on that part of the wall which will be hidden by furniture or covered with pictures. Very frequently, too, there will be some marked feature in the room—an arched recess perhaps, a moulded ceiling or a prominent chimney-piece—that of itself suggests a

certain scheme of decoration; or the furniture may do the same.

In decorating the walls, economy being an object, we will use paper for the dado, choosing a pattern somewhat severe or stiff in style, partly because it seems fit that the base of a wall should be rigid, and partly in order that we may with propriety break out into freer and more flowing forms in the wall above. If we began at the bottom with flowers and scrolls, what

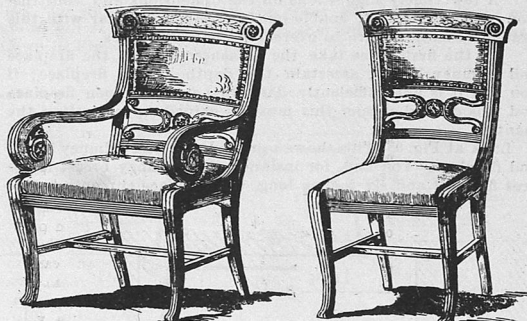


ARM AND SIDE CHAIR IN THE COLONIAL STYLE. BY THE PALMER & EMBURY M^FG CO.

should we arrive at by the time we reached the ceiling? The wall above the dado is the place for freer ornament, and here again we may as well adopt paper as the simplest, cheapest and most effective means of giving interest to a wall space. This may be finished off immediately below the cornice by a frieze, deeper or shallower according to the height of the room, very similar in tone (and perhaps in character too) to the wall-paper.

It is commonly believed that such a frieze lowers the room in appearance. If it do so, it is the fault of the contrast in color or of the strength of the pattern. A frieze, fitly chosen, only serves to prevent the lines of the wall-paper from seeming to run behind the cornice. There is no reason whatever why it should draw attention to itself. It may even, by connecting the wall surface with the cornice, draw the eye up to the ceiling, and so give the appearance of greater height to a room.

On the cornice we will waste no labor in "picking out;" all that is wanted is a few shades of intermediate color to con-



ARM AND SIDE CHAIR IN THE COLONIAL STYLE. BY THE PALMER & EMBURY M^FG CO.

nect the wall with the ceiling. If the mouldings are in themselves bald and uninteresting, some stencilled pattern work may be necessary in order to make up for the shortcomings of the plastered work.

The ceiling is most easily distempered or papered, the color in either case being a much paler echo of one or two of the colors prevailing on the walls. Crude white is in favor with housewives for ceilings—"It looks so clean." That is just its fault. It looks so clean, even when it is not, that it makes all

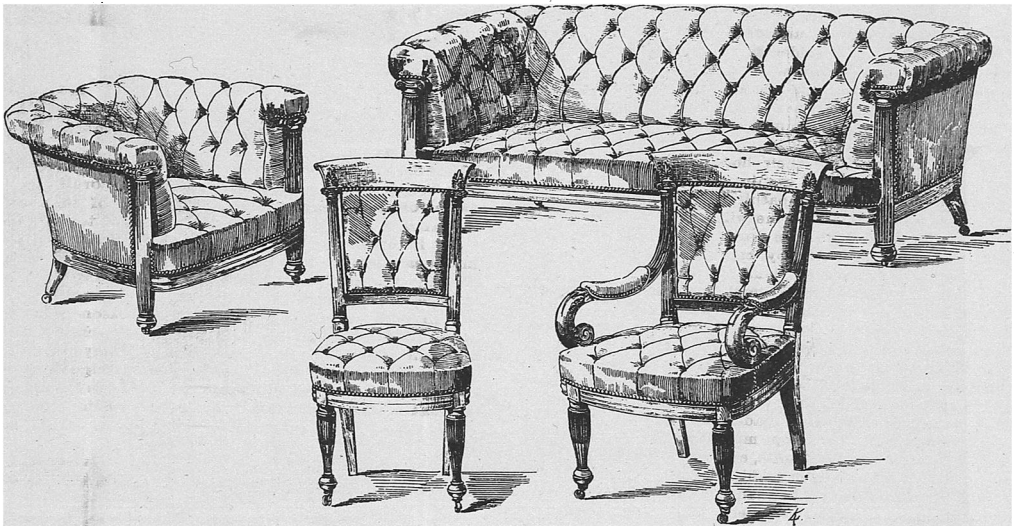
else look dirty, even though it may be clean. To paint the flat ceiling of a moderate sized room by hand is simply a waste of labor. It is only at great personal inconvenience that one can look long at it, whilst as a matter of fact no one cares to do so. You see it, occasionally, by accident and for a moment, and, that that casual glimpse should not be a shock to the eye, it is as well to tint it in accordance with the room, or even cover it with a simple diapered paper, which will to some extent withdraw the attention from the cracks that frequently disfigure the ceilings of modern houses.

What hand-painting we can afford may best be reserved for the panels of the doors, window shutters and the like, where it can be seen—these doors and the other woodwork being painted in two or three shades of color, flat or varnished, according as we prefer softness of tone or durability of surface. Perhaps it will be best in this instance that the woodwork should fall in with the tone of the dado; but this is not a point on which any rule can be laid down. The decoration of the panels should be in keeping with the wall-paper patterns. It may be much more pronounced than they, but still it must not assert itself. One great point of consideration in the decoration of a room is the relation of the various patterns one to another. It may often be well to sacrifice an otherwise admirable design simply because you can find nothing else to go with

at, not to be used, and the latter is fit only for meals or a round game. A great proportion of furniture is made only for the show-room.

On each side of the fire-place is a low book shelf, so arranged that as one sits by the fire one can always reach a book without effort—a perpetual temptation to reading. The books are of all kinds, for all moods; some books of reference in particular, and these especially close at hand; in short, there is no excuse for indolence. On the top of the bookcases will stand candles or a reading-lamp ready. On the further side of the room is a cottage piano, music in this case not being of sufficient importance to warrant the sacrifice of space as well as beauty involved in the admission of a "grand." It appears to be an accepted fact (is it really a fact, I wonder?) that the fittest shape for a piano is the most hideous.

For other furniture we have two small cabinets, one for music and another for photographs; a small movable table that will serve either as work or card table; at least four substantial chairs; a music chair; a sofa and half a dozen easy chairs, all different in shape. These last are for passive enjoyment. If you are really in a lazy mood, no one chair is comfortable for long, and your greatest chance of rest is to change the chair you sit in. These seats are covered with stuffs of rich and warm effect, all of them different, but all of them in harmony;



COLONIAL LIBRARY SUITE IN LEATHER. BY THE PALMER & EMBURY M'g Co.

it. A single pattern, once chosen, will often control the whole scheme of decoration.

The carpet shall be Persian. Or, better still, there shall be no carpet but a sufficiency of Persian rugs—distributed as comfort may suggest, the floor of the room being polished, if it is good enough, or if not, stained and varnished or even painted. It is advisable always to have as little carpet about the room as is consistent with warmth. The worst thing one can do is to nail a carpet down over the whole area of the room. There is nothing like a carpet to hold dust. But the rugs can be taken up daily and shaken; and thus, moreover, the wear of brushing is saved. In the pattern of the carpet the chief thing to be sought is unobtrusiveness; color, too, if it is to be had; but the more blurred and broken the better—anything like definite form is more than dangerous. Often a plain color would answer every decorative purpose, but plain surfaces tell too many tales.

Now we may begin to ask what furniture is wanted, and let us be sure that we consult our actual wants and not other people's prejudices. We must have a table large enough for use, and firm enough on its legs to work at, and not a "shaped" table or a round one; the former is made to be looked

none of them, however, of velvet like the curtains. The effect of velvet is perfect; it falls admirably too, and wears well enough, but it clings too much to answer the purpose of a comfortable cushion. Another provision is that none of the material used shall be so costly as to need covering up.

The curtains hang from a brass pole just stout enough to bear them, and fall in straight folds nearly to the ground. They are not looped up; there are no superfluous cords, tassels or fringes anywhere; in particular, there is no millinery about the window. It may be noticed that in this room there is no looking glass. The perpetual nuisance of seeing oneself reflected at every turn in a mirror more than outweighs any convenience there may be in it. If such an article had been necessary, the best thing would have been to frame it something like the photographs and hang it like a picture, only out of the way, so that one could not see oneself in it without "malice prepense."

The clock, which hangs in the corner, is of brass, and so are the door handles and other little fittings, the fender, fire-irons and coal scuttle. It so happens that the candlesticks and one or two other objects on the mantelpiece are also of brass. Not that it follows because one thing is brass that all the other

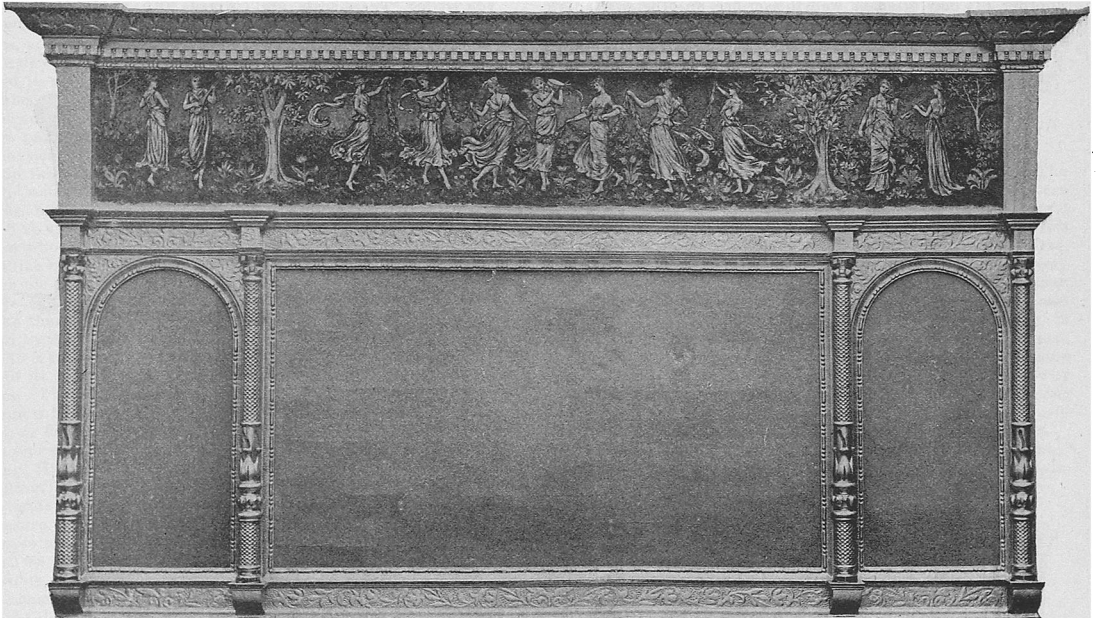
THE DECORATOR AND FURNISHER.

things should be of the same; but even the little knick-knacks in a room should go together—they should not look as if they had come together by accident. So with the style of the furniture in our typical apartment. It does not all come from one workshop, and certainly it is not what is commercially called “a set,” or, more magnificently, “*en suite*,” but whether it be light or heavy, florid or severe, it has some character, and that character pervades everything.

All is substantial, too, and well made, the first expense of good workmanship being counterbalanced by the saving effected in doing without all that was not really wanted. Even the most economically disposed of “those about to furnish” start with a preconceived idea that they must have many things for which they have no use, and no excuse but custom. Nowhere is there in our apartment any sham construction or stuck-on ornament. The chairs and sofa show their framing, and are comfortably padded; they are not overgrown bolsters with iron entrails. It is a popular superstition to suppose that the most apoplectic-looking chairs are the easiest; but, in truth, it is the *form* of a chair, and not its padding, that has most to do with its ease. From the maker's point of view the preference for formlessness

had been of a more bookish turn of mind. It would have been easy to modify the same scheme to suit his tastes. On the preceding page I have shown something of the sort. Books occupy the most important place in the room. The shelves form a decorative feature all round the room, fixed at a level most convenient for use, high enough to allow the chairs to be set back against the wall under them (in that way economising space), and low enough to form a broad shelf, available either for useful or ornamental purposes. The wall space above still affords room for a few pictures, more particularly if they are bold enough in style to look well at a certain distance from the eye, and over the mantel-piece, where the book shelves could not be conveniently carried, would be a place of honor more worthily filled by work of art than by a sheet of looking-glass. In the framing of the picture in my illustration, the simple plan has been adopted (for the sake of economy) of carrying on the lines of the somewhat commonplace mantel-piece that one finds in ordinary houses; but with greater outlay a much more important feature might have been made of this “over-mantel.”

The corner of the room, where some space would be wasted if the shelves were allowed to meet at right angles, is just the



GILT OVERMANTEL, WITH THREE BEVELED MIRRORS AND PAINTED FRIEZE. BY ALDAM HEATON.

is easily explained; it hides all sins of construction, and good joinery is costly. It may have happened to some of my readers to come in contact with a dressmaker whose panacea for everything was padding; but will any amount of padding supply the place of a good cut?

Little now remains to complete the furniture of the interior I have attempted to sketch. Even such a room will not look quite homely at first—it will want a few weeks' wear. The occupants will soon find that there are some further contrivances for comfort that have been overlooked. If, when these have been supplied, and the different members of the scheme have had time to mingle together and be on friendly terms all round, the effect should be still unsatisfactory, it must be that I made a false start at the beginning, and quite misunderstood the wants of my imaginary employer. But of this I am certain, that if he is once satisfied with a room furnished on the principles here advocated, it will continue to grow in his affections and he will become more and more loth to make any serious alteration in it as the years go on.

The principles, let me say, are capable of the widest possible application. Suppose, for instance, the owner of this room

place for a useful cupboard, and the door panel of such a prominent piece of furniture is just the place for a decorative figure, inlaid or painted, as the case may be, for it faces the owner as he sits in his easy chair by the fire. His back is to the light, and he can read with comfort. On the table at his left is a movable desk, in case he should want to make a note, and at his right hand the bookcase is carried for once nearly down to the ground, so as to accommodate the larger books of reference which he likes to have near him. The inscription on the frieze of the bookcase is introduced to show that there is always an opportunity somewhere in the room for the whim or fancy of its inmate.

Further description is unnecessary. This is only one out of any number of schemes that might have been built upon a man's personal ideal. My argument is that that ideal should be the basis of his domestic decoration, whatever that idea may be.

PALACES on wheels are the new Wagner cars of the great through trains of the New York Central.